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CURRENT LITERATURE.

BOOK REVIEWS.

An American illustrated flora.

STUDENTS of American plants have been wont to regard their transatlantic associates with envy on account of their numerous helps in determining plants. It seems as though no European should go astray in the recognition of the plants about him. In America, however, we have, of necessity, accustomed ourselves to bare texts, expressive as they could be, but not half expressive enough. The Gray Manual region is certainly our best known region, but to the average student of wild plants there remain in it more plants that he is uncertain about than those that he absolutely knows. He probably names almost all of them, but the mental question mark is appended to more of them than he would like to acknowledge. Most of this has arisen from the lack of that clearest of all kinds of presentation, accurate illustration. Illustrated works upon American plants have been projected, and have advanced to various stages of completion, but even had they all reached a happy conclusion they have either been too elaborate for common use or too popular to be of scientific value. The work we were waiting for was one that should be complete in illustration, scientifically accurate, and still of moderate cost. That such a work has appeared ¹ will be a surprise to many and a great boon to all.

The field of this work is entirely unoccupied, and its publication marks a new impulse in the study of the so-called "manual plants." The order of presentation, beginning with the lowest forms, is but an expression of modern methods, and should have been adopted by manuals long since. The sequence of orders follows the same tendency and gives us, so far as any lineal arrangement can, the best we know concerning natural sequence. The distinct policy of multiplying families and genera is followed, these groups being regarded as matters of convenience, and convenience being increased by segregation. There can be no question as to the convenience of the plan if the determination of the plants be the sole object. The question may be

¹ BRITTON, NATHANIEL LORD and BROWN, HON. ADDISON.—An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British Possessions, from Newfoundland to the parallel of the southern boundary of Virginia, and from the Atlantic ocean westward to the 102d meridian: in three volumes. Vol. I. Ophioglossaceæ to Aizoaceæ. Pp. xii+612. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1896. \$3.00 a volume.

raised, however, whether this recognition of all easily separable groups may not suppress too much the fact of larger groupings which any natural scheme must involve. Perhaps it is not possible to carry out one purpose well without distorting something else, and it becomes a question of judgment as to what must be sacrificed.

Every species is illustrated, and when one is reminded that about 4,000 species of pteridophytes and spermatophytes are found within the region covered, the undertaking seems enormous. The illustrations are set in the text, opposite the description, and in most cases three species fill a page. The figures are excellent and clearly printed, showing just the features needed for discrimination, and eliminating all the unnecessary "picture" element. In the first volume the figures number 1,425, and more than three-fourths of them are of species that have never been figured before.

In such a work the question of nomenclature is a mere incident. It need only be remarked that the nomenclature is a consistent carrying out of the principles enunciated in what is known as the Rochester code and exemplified in the "Check-List," and that its embodiment in a work of this character will go far towards establishing it. The prominence given to synonymy easily offsets the inconvenience of new names.

To this first volume Professor Underwood has contributed the text on the Pteridophyta, Mr. F. V. Coville that of the Juncaceæ, Dr. John K. Small that of the Polygonaceæ and Euphorbiaceæ. Mr. Arthur Hollick has had supervision of the drawings in general, and Professor F. Lamson-Scribner of those of Gramineæ. The work of the late Dr. Morong is also seen in the groups to which he paid chief attention, many of which are included in the present volume.

When all the assistance has been accounted for, however, the fact remains that it represents an enormous amount of hard and patient work on the part of the authors. It is to be hoped that the gratitude which is their due will find its expression in the immediate exhaustion of the first edition. Certainly no American botanist, who has any occasion to determine plants, can afford to be without this greatest help since the original publication of Gray's Manual. We look forward with great interest to the succeeding volumes, an interest all the greater as they will contain a better representation of Professor Britton's own work, and will deal with groups of larger general interest. It is to be hoped that nothing will delay their speedy appearance, so that the volumes may be practically synchronous, although the amount of work involved would seem to make this well-nigh impossible.—J. M. C.